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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL: IDF OPERATION IN GAZA SPURS ROCKET ATTACK

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: IDF forces entered into the Gaza Strip during the evening of November 4 to collapse a tunnel purportedly to be used to kidnap IDF soldiers near the Gaza security fence. Several Hamas militants were killed and IDF soldiers wounded in the ensuing firefight. Hamas responded November 4 and 5 by launching over 35 rockets and mortars into the Negev and the coastal area in the vicinity of Ashkelon. This is the first armed clash in the Gaza Strip since the "tahdiyah" ceasefire was declared on June 19, 2008.

GOI officials and IDF statements make clear from their perspective the IDF was acting against an immediate threat, and that Israel apparently has no intention of escalating the situation. Statements from Hamas condemn the operation as a violation of the ceasefire and promise a harsh response -- although it is not clear whether Hamas will follow through with these threats. End summary.

¶2. (U) IDF forces uncovered a tunnel from the Gaza Strip into Israel during the late evening of November 4. An IDF statement issued November 5 claimed the tunnel was to be used "for the immediate abduction of IDF soldiers" located 250 meters from the Gaza security fence. According to the IDF, an operation to destroy the tunnel was conducted by IDF forces inside Gaza to "prevent an immediate threat." During the operation, armed terrorists inside a structure located above the tunnel opened fire on IDF forces, who then returned fire. Several mortar shells were fired at the IDF forces during the operation; the Israel Air Force reportedly launched two separate strikes on cells launching the mortar shells. Two IDF soldiers were moderately wounded and four others lightly wounded in the firefight. According to the IDF, IDF forces killed "a number" of armed terrorists; press reports widely differ but suggest as many as six Hamas operatives were killed in the operation. IDF forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip following the operation.

¶3. (U) Hamas responded to the attack by launching over 35 Qassam rockets and mortars into the Western Negev and coastal area north of Gaza. Press reports suggest two rockets exploded in Ashkelon; there have been no reported injuries as a result of the attack, although two women were hospitalized due to shock. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum described the IDF operation as "criminal," and "a dangerous violation of the truce," "proving that (Israel) is seeking an escalation rather than calm." A spokesperson for Hamas' military wing, Abu Obeid, stated that Hamas will "fight off any Israeli operation," and promised a response from Hamas that will "be harsh, and the enemy will pay a heavy price."

Comment

¶4. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai emphasized following an emergency security council session hosted by Defense Minister Barak early November 5 that Israel does not plan to violate the ceasefire, and does not want to escalate the situation. He explained that the IDF had operated in Gaza against an immediate threat, which was in violation of the ceasefire. The GOI's only response thus far to over 35

rockets and mortars has been to close the crossings -- this seems to reinforce the GOI's claim that they want to keep the ceasefire in place. Comments from Knesset members spanned from Likud (Gideon Sarr and Gilad Erdan), which criticized FM Livni and Barak for focusing on settler violence at the expense of the safety of Israeli citizens near Gaza, to Kadima (Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yitzhak Ben Israel), which praised the IDF for taking action against an immediate threat and suggesting this may bolster Israel's deterrence. Given the risk to the ceasefire, IDF forces likely viewed intelligence on an immediate threat as highly credible. Despite Hamas' statements following the operation and subsequent rocket attack, it is not clear whether Hamas will further retaliate at this time.

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